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THE FIRST CENTURY OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE.

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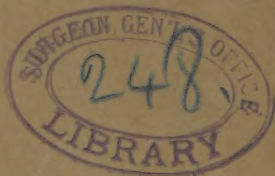
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WITH ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS

BY

W. ALFRED JONES, A. M.,  
Librarian.



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# THE FIRST CENTURY OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE.

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It has been the fashion of late years, since the removal of Columbia College up-town, in 1857, for many of its new friends, who are apparently quite ignorant of its past history, to speak of it as a new institution, destined to thrive under their patronage and guidance. In their view, its increased funds, and enlarged corps of instructors, are to give it a character and popularity it never had before. There was undoubtedly room for improvement, and need of more ample resources; but for the sake of those who require the information, we present a list of the more distinguished alumni of the College, since its foundation, in 1754; of its particularly eminent trustees, and of its ablest professors, during the first century of its existence; and it will be well if the next century shows on its record a list of equally pure and able men among its trustees, officers, and graduates, proportionate to the



increased number of students, and its augmented resources.

In a very interesting article on our Colleges in the Revolution, written by the Hon. J. T. Headley, and published in the KNICKERBOCKER MAGAZINE for April, 1861 (a most exciting period in our civil war), a graphic narrative is given of the part taken by Harvard University, Yale College, and Nassau Hall, at Princeton; and an enthusiastic and merited eulogy is pronounced on the Faculties and students of those venerable seats of learning, and their no less venerated Presidents—Langdon, Doggett, Dwight, and Witherspoon, zealous and intelligent statesmen, and true patriots; with a word of commendation at the close for the College of William and Mary, and Brown University; but not a syllable is to be found referring to Columbia—then King's—College. Yet, though originally a royal college (chartered by George the Second) and a Church college, too, in a city held during the war by the British, no institution in our land sent forth, in proportion to its numbers, more devoted adherents to the cause of American Independence. It was then in its infancy, and had, up to 1775, only one hundred graduates; but, despite this paucity of numbers, no American college furnished from its alumni names more noble, or more worthy of lasting remembrance, than Columbia. In its then short list occur the names of Bishop

Provoost, one of the Fathers of the Church in the United States, and a genuine patriot; in this respect, unlike a majority of the Episcopal clergy of his day, the best and purest of whom, Seabury, Inglis, Wilkins, Vardill, Auchmuty, and Chandler, were naturally high-toned loyalists, having been ordained in England, and regarding the mother Church and royal government there, as strictly "the powers that be"—the government *de facto*, as well as in their eyes *de jure*; from which they derived their authority and support in a considerable degree, and to which they looked for countenance and direction. Egbert Benson, the jurist and sage; the Memoir of whom, by Chancellor Kent, in "Thompson's History of Long Island," is written in a constant strain of enthusiastic encomium. Robert R. Livingston, the great Chancellor, our Minister to France, and a personal friend of Napoleon, as well as a public-spirited citizen. Gouverneur Morris, the far-seeing statesman, astute diplomat, and eloquent orator. "The gallant soldiers, Van Cortlandt, Troup, Ritzema, Van Schaack, and Dunscomb," to employ the language of Ex-President Duer; and especially Willett, the favorite leader of the New York Liberty Boys; but pre-eminently Alexander Hamilton and John Jay. Upon these honored names, the pride and boast of Columbia, the purest writer of the College Faculty has written this elegant eulogium: "Before our Revolution-



ary struggle, while itself was scarce fledged, our college took an eagle's flight, and gave to the nation, and its coming contest, I might almost say its sword and shield—the Marcellus and Fabius of our Rome—Hamilton and Jay. What, I pray you, were the story of our Revolution without these names?"

Three names of patriotic trustees, "among the faithless only faithful found," should be added to this catalogue; that of James Duane, afterwards the first Mayor of New York City after the Revolution, a Judge of the District Court, and a prominent politician; Doctor Thomas Jones, brother of the more celebrated Doctor John Jones; and William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, more generally known as a distinguished Major-General of our army; and of the Medical Faculty of that period, Doctor Samuel Bard and John Jones, "ever to be remembered as the physician of Washington and surgeon of Franklin." We think we may also claim the Hon. Henry Cruger, the colleague of Burke, from Bristol, in the English Parliament, who is said by his biographer, Mr. Van Schaack, to have been educated at King's College, although his name does not appear in the list of graduates. And here let us quote again from Doctor M'Vickar, the polished writer before mentioned: "When that eventful struggle (of our Revolution) was over, and order was to be built up out of ruin, what college of our land, I ask, furnished archi-

fects of their country's greatness, earlier or abler, more zealous or more successful, than our own, even dismantled and robbed as she was, through the license of war, of all the usual aids and appliances of learning and science? Scarce had the din of arms given way in our city to the quiet arts of peace, before she sent forth her sons, as before, *leaders* to their countrymen, only now in a peaceful field, turning the sword into a ploughshare."

Five eminent persons, in addition to those before named, we shall enumerate in this connection; not all of them graduates, but each identified with the history of the College, after its reorganization, in 1783. Its first President, the second Doctor Johnson—the first of Columbia, as his father had been the first of King's, and equally able as a statesman and scholar; DeWitt Clinton, the first student who presented himself for admission into the Junior Class, under its new name and government; John Randolph of Roanoke, the satiric wit and eccentric character, "one of the students of the college during these first years of its renewed existence, but who did not finish his course;" Doctor John M. Mason, the vigorous provost, the able preacher, and the champion of the Presbyterians; and Rufus King, the diplomatist and orator, and elegant gentleman, who served the College for eighteen years as trustee.\*

\* As a distinguished Trustee, Dr. John H. Livingston, the Patriarch of the Dutch Church, should be included in this brief list.



Among the eminent graduates of Columbia College are many of the most distinguished clergy of the Episcopal Church (besides prominent ministers of the various other religious denominations), and five of our bishops in particular—the venerable Bishop Moore, the zealous and apostolic Hobart, the two Onderdonks, the staunch and learned brother diocesans, and the courtly Wainwright.

The foremost lawyers at the bar, and jurists on the bench of our State and city, and in the United States courts, have been among the alumni of Columbia; such as—to select a few names not before enumerated: Harrison, Jones, Ogden, Hoffman, Wells, Robinson, Lawrence, and other representatives of the families of Jay, Hamilton, and a score of their rivals and peers, of the very first class; while of a secondary rank many more might be mentioned.

Of the medical faculty it is but necessary to recall the great names of Osborn, Jones, Bard, Kissam, Watts, Seaman, Mott, Post, Hosack, and Francis.

To specify the merely able, not the pre-eminently distinguished individuals in the different professions, would fill several pages, and would be an invidious task at best, especially where the living alumni are concerned; not to be executed without great prudence, and one, for which reason, we shall not undertake.

We may remark, in passing, that the legal profession



may justly claim, for numbers and ability, the foremost place; the ratio of prominent lawyers being out of all proportion to that of distinguished divines or skilful physicians.

A list of no inconsiderable length might be drawn up of alumni who have, during the past half-century, or since the second war with Great Britain, attained high political distinction. But these are universally known, in the legislature, in the gubernatorial chair, and in the various important offices of the State.

Neither shall we attempt to compile a catalogue of the eminent merchants, who have received their education at Columbia College. This would form a fit topic for an anniversary oration, by an elder alumnus, competent from personal knowledge to chronicle the career of the Bayards, Beekmans, Ludlows, Laights, and a hundred others of the mercantile families, or supporters of the traditional commercial glories of old New York.

Among the men of practical, scientific skill, which our country has produced, we should not fail to claim John Stevens among our alumni, distinguished not only for his individual talents, but also as the head of a family celebrated for genius in mechanical invention.

Of the members of the College Faculty, who, from their scholarship, or published works, or traditionary reputation, deserve to be held in honorable remembrance,

we should mention, in particular, Doctor Johnson, the first President of King's College, and the friend of Secker and Franklin; his son, the first President of Columbia College; Myles Cooper, the loyalist and classical scholar; Bishop Moore, and Doctor John M. Mason; the worthy, paternal Doctor Harris; Doctor W. A. Duer, the high-toned gentleman; Doctor N. F. Moore, the refined scholar; and the present active and zealous head of the College, Doctor King.

The list of Professors during this period includes (as do the catalogues of the officers of all colleges and universities) English, French, and German, as well as American names, of scholars and instructors unknown in a majority of cases, beyond the walls of their college; but it also includes names of deserved celebrity, a majority of whom, too, are among its most meritorious alumni; such as Doctors Gross, Kemp, Kunze, Wilson, Mitchell, M<sup>r</sup>. Vickar, Moore, Renwick, Anthon, Chancellor Kent, Betts, his successor, Drisler, Da Ponte, and Schaeffer.

A highly respectable body, select if not extensive, should be included among the celebrities of the College, composed of all those who have earned a pure literary reputation. In this *corps of littérateurs*, some names present themselves of national reputation, while others enjoy a merely local fame, and are comparatively, but most undeservedly, forgotten by the present generation of readers



who thirst after modern inferior novelties, while they neglect the sterling works of an earlier date. With two or three exceptions, the authors of Columbia are either to be numbered with the dead, or are on the retired list.

The first division embraces Jonathan Lawrence, a true poet, though he left but a few fugitive specimens of his youthful genius; Clason, a brilliant versifier, and an accomplished though unfortunate man; Drake, the friend of Halleck, gifted with vivid fancy and power of language (Dr. Griswold has recorded these last two in his "American Parnassus," as graduates of Columbia—though we cannot find their names in the printed list); Eastburn, the friend and poetical coadjutor of Sands; Sands himself, a humorist, scholar, and poet; Arden, the translator of Ovid; Griffin, the youthful professor and pure student; William P. Hawes, an original humorist and disciple of Elia, worthy of his master; Daniel Seymour, the able linguist and general scholar; Theodore Sedgwick, the economist and biographer; and John L. Stephens, the popular and adventurous traveller, as well as active projector and man of business. The last three, we believe, reached middle-life; the others died comparatively young.

The second classification includes those who, from age or long silence, may be considered to have terminated their literary career—though we should be glad to hear

from them again. Of these we may mention Dr. Clement C. Moore, who holds the first place, and is one of the few living graduates of the latter years (1798) of the past century; a refined and classic poetical writer of the school of Goldsmith and Cowper, with a mingled happy vein of delicate humor and pathetic sentiment; Gulian C. Verplanck, almost his contemporary, a general scholar of discrimination and research; and Dr. J. W. Francis (since deceased), the genial humorist and sturdy scholar.—We have seen nothing bearing his name in print, for some years, from Laughton Osborn, the cultivated scholar and satirist—although he is not entitled by age, surely, to be considered as on the retired list. But we fear the name of Charles F. Hoffman must be placed there, as his sad fate almost precludes the hope of any further genial productions of the fine mind of this chivalric poet and brilliant prose-writer. Mr. Hoffman was not a graduate of the College, which he left in his Junior year; but at the semi-centennial celebration of its incorporation, he received the honorary degree of A. M.—a rare honor, since conferred on him, in company with William Cullen Bryant, Fitz-Greene Halleck, and Washington Irving—the foremost names in our literature.

Of the living writers, from whom the public may expect to hear more, and with reiterated pleasure, we should enumerate E. A. Duyckinck, editor of the “Lit-



erary World"—the best literary weekly journal of our time—and compiler of the "Cyclopædia of American Literature;" J. C. Hurd, the philosophical jurist; the Rev. Dr. Williams, of the Baptist denomination, and undoubtedly their greatest name in this country; H. Onderdonk, Jr., the historian; Gillespie, the traveller and scientific writer; and Dr. Spencer, the classical critic, theologian, and Eastern traveller.

We take no notice of compilers of school-books; nor is it our intention to enumerate every writer of an address or political pamphlet, else the foregoing list might be greatly enlarged by the addition of the names of "the mob of gentlemen who write with ease" what is hard to read. We record only writers of established reputation.

Much of old New York's social history may be gleaned from an historical record of the Alumni of Columbia College. From the college album a list might be compiled, comprising much of the wit and worth, the wealth and respectability of the metropolis, during the past century. In this honored list the names of old New York families are to be found, whose descendants to the fourth generation are still represented in succeeding classes of students. The great-grandsons of the worthies of King's College are among the present under-graduates.

In common with all old institutions of whatever character—literary, political, social or religious—a trite

charge is often brought against this venerable college, by flippant pretenders to smartness, of old-fogyism. The old-fogyism of Columbia is what the phrase often implies—conservatism; in this case, too, a wise conservatism. While other literary institutions, of great promise and much greater pretension, have gone down, this stable seminary, strong in its endowment (judiciously managed), in the prudent councils of its trustees, the ability of its faculty, and in the character of its graduates, holds on the even and noiseless tenor of its way—constantly though quietly advancing.

An ancient seat of learning in the commercial metropolis of the country, this college is, in a certain sense, placed in a false position; for in the bustle of trade, and the throng of a populous city, letters and science are comparatively forgotten. The various interests of business and pleasure are apt to conflict with the quiet pursuits of the scholar, seeking wisdom “in the still air of delightful studies;” and amid the diversified attractions of a great city, the college is, to a certain extent, overshadowed and unheeded. But despite these disadvantages, she enjoys many compensating aids to learning, in the assemblage of learned men, the practical illustration of the sciences as adapted to the arts of life, in access to libraries and collections, and the sympathies that should ever exist between the true philosophical scholar and the mass of active intelligent life glowing around him.







